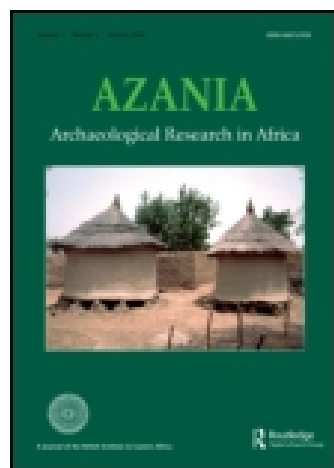


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The Cinderella metaphor: South African archaeology (still) in the making

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This paper provides an overview of how the rapid pace of political and economic changes that have occurred in South Africa over the last 20 years and have framed and reframed the heritage agenda. It tracks how these shifting national imperatives have impacted on the development and practice of archaeology in the country.

Keywords: Transformation in archaeology; South Africa; national heritage; neoliberal imperatives

Cet article présente un aperçu de la manière dont l'allure rapide des changements politiques et économiques en Afrique du Sud dans les 20 dernières années ont situé et resitué les programmes de patrimoine culturel. Il analyse la façon dont ces priorités nationales changeantes ont influencé le développement et la pratique de l'archéologie dans le pays.

Almost two decades ago Janette Deacon (1993) referred to Ray Inskeep's use of the Cinderella metaphor in her review of the professionalisation of archaeology in South Africa. Inskeep (1963) had invoked the metaphor 20 years earlier to draw attention to the way in which archaeology was being neglected at that time. Deacon's paper then mapped out Inskeep's role in developing and professionalising the discipline. At the end of her paper she light-heartedly pondered whether Cinderella had found her Fairy Godmother? Or whether Prince Charming had appeared? And whether archaeology would live happily ever after? Deacon went on, of course, to warn that the use of metaphors, while amusing, tends to over-simplify complex situations. Nevertheless, twenty years on, I feel I am in a position to answer some of these questions. This paper will show that while the Fairy Godmother did conjure up a vehicle for Cinderella to interact with her charming liberator, the pumpkin-shell framework was too soft and began to disintegrate around 20:11. Prince Charming became distracted by one of the ugly sisters, who promised him wealth and shares in the mines, and Cinderella was unable to achieve full transformation because her sooty undergarment kept showing when she tried to dance. She was last seen hiding behind the other two ugly sisters, Instrumentalia and Neoliberalia, and from this marginal position was not really enjoying the party. But let me not get ahead of myself. I shall, instead, suspend the allegory for the duration of the paper and search out Cinderella again in my conclusion.

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Heritage is a slippery customer. It is widely acknowledged that it is tightly linked to processes of identity formation, that it is constituted and re-constituted in order to manufacture a sense of kinship, community or nationhood (Lowenthal 1998, xi; Coombe 2009, 397). The tendency for heritage to be reinvented or recreated in social practice (Coombe 2009, 406) means that it is variously referred to as a porous, malleable, ambiguous or transformative process that often draws on elements from history to achieve some present purpose. It is no surprise, then, that in the neoliberal state *heritage* moves easily in corporate circles and into the spheres of branding, commodities and intellectual and cultural property rights (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). It is, after all, the growth of the heritage industry that has caused scholars to rail against the abuse of history, or to lament that ‘cherished’ heritage is being reduced to ‘tourist kitsch’ (Lowenthal 1998, 96) and that heritage centres are becoming purveyors of ‘empty spectacle and meretricious entertainment’ (Hewison 1988, 240). Nevertheless, despite being tagged as deceitful, heritage was, and still is, considered a bankable item because it connotes legitimacy and authenticity (Lowenthal 1998, 94).

This paper tracks the way that heritage has morphed in South Africa over the last 20 years and how this has variously inspired, exasperated or exhausted professional archaeologists in the country.

In the 1990s Madiba-ism prevailed. Madiba (former president Nelson Mandela) became the symbol of, and monument to, the triumph of good over evil, of forgiveness and reconciliation; he became World Heritage. South Africa was a place of miracles and magic. The new nation was emblematised in a rainbow — a symbol of multiculturalism, tolerance, reconciliation and hope. Cultural pluralism coupled with tolerance offered a way for multiple and conflicting versions of the past to emerge and to exist side-by-side. In this way, *apartheid* myths were politely undermined rather than forcibly removed. For example, the Voortrekker Monument, commemorating the Afrikaner colonisation of the interior of South Africa, would be allowed to remain standing, but would be balanced by Freedom Park, while the narrative of the Battle of Blood River Monument, celebrating Afrikaner victory over a Zulu army in 1838, would be counter-balanced with the Ncome Monument situated on the opposite bank of the river. However, many of these alternative histories did not take shape according to academic expectation. Anthropologists and archaeologists watched with dismay as many of the old *apartheid* artefacts were adopted and reinforced and as ‘tribal’ and ‘traditional’ identities were reconstituted, funded and turned into commercial ventures (Van Kessel and Oomen 1997; Comaroff and Comaroff 2009).

In 1996 heritage was cast in a reconciliatory frame and regarded as a source of inspiration and spiritual upliftment. In this respect the discipline got off to a good start when archaeologists, communities, government and National Parks officials participated in the excavation and reburial of human skeletons at Thulamela, a Zimbabwe Culture site in the far north of Kruger Park. This project was lauded as a precedent-setting case for the rest of the world ‘... an academic version of South Africa’s “rainbow phenomenon”’ (*Mail and Guardian*, 27 September 1996). Indeed, after 1994 the archaeological fraternity was buoyed by the excitement around transformation and was kept busy trying to keep up with the level of change that the new government demanded. Amongst other things, the policy of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) called for a radical reframing of heritage legislation and

the qualification framework. The new qualification framework introduced an Outcomes Based Education (OBE) system of life-long learning, which had a strong vocational slant so that people with little or no formal education could be assessed and accredited and become linked into the education system. OBE created more than one opportunity for archaeology to enter the education system: first, through formal schooling and second through the informal education sector, which allowed people to train on the job or to receive accreditation for prior experience. Between 1995 and 2004, members of the Southern African Association of Archaeologists (SA3) participated in a number of initiatives geared towards ensuring the inclusion of archaeology in the new education system. An educational sub-committee of SA3 met in 1995 to produce a guide to inform curriculum developers. The document was penned, with the assistance of Peter Stone (then of English Heritage), and presented to the national Parliament's Education Portfolio Committee in March 1996. The Council of SA3 then assigned members to the Human and Social Sciences and Life Sciences Learning Area Committees set up by the Department of Education to ensure that archaeology featured in school curricula. Another group worked to identify and register core and elective unit standards to provide people with opportunities to obtain a Grade 11 and 12 equivalency in archaeology and also drew up unit standards for tourist guides and other heritage-related courses. These efforts bore fruit in 2000 when the then Minister of Education, the late Kadar Asmal, appointed a panel of historians and an archaeologist to investigate the teaching of history and archaeology in schools. The core of this group then became a ministerial committee with an advisory remit.

This educational thrust was bolstered by efforts from most of South Africa's universities and museums. Some began to experiment with computer-mediated education (CME) as a means of introducing archaeology into the classroom, while others assisted materials developers or developed their own materials for dissemination. Museums and universities, often in collaboration, obtained funding to develop community-run museums and several projects were undertaken to encourage children from all levels of society — from private schools to street children — to visit and enjoy historical and archaeological sites.

An equal amount of energy was invested in writing and commenting on the new heritage legislation. The new National Heritage Resources Act of 1999 (NHRA), which has been widely admired for being progressive, was able to combine the social import of heritage with management strategies. The legislation recognised the important interplay between cultural heritage, identity and the well being of people. It stressed the role of heritage in social healing and in providing material and symbolic restitution to societies that had been disadvantaged and denigrated during the *apartheid* years. Following UNESCO's 1989 *Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Cultural and Folklore*, it promoted 'new and previously neglected research' into customs and oral traditions, and made provision for community level participation by creating a three-tier system for the recognition of heritage, i.e. national, provincial and local (NHRA 1999, Preamble and Section 7).

A further innovation of the new legislation was the integration of heritage protection with environmental protection and development planning, so that, in terms of the National Environmental Management Act of 1998 (NEMA), the NHRA of 1999 (Section 38), and the Minerals and Petroleum Resources Development Act of 2002 (MPRDA) a heritage assessment became a component of

the environmental impact assessment processes. This had a powerful effect on the profession, both in training and practice, because it extended the job market into the private sector and created a competitive consulting environment (Department of Science and Technology 2010).

Towards the end of the 1990s heritage discourse in South Africa began to be reframed through the guise and guidance of then president Thabo Mbeki's legacy projects. African Renaissance, for example, focused the national narrative on the rediscovery of a glorious precolonial past, and promoted the recognition of oral histories as history, African intellectuals and indigenous knowledge systems (see for example, Mbeki 1996, 2005). On the one hand, archaeology could comfortably situate itself within these socio-political objectives — the archaeological past was, after all, at the centre of the South African heritage re-awakening and three World Heritage Sites were listed on the strength of their archaeological and palaeo-anthropological research value. The Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site west of Johannesburg supported the notion of an African Naissance and the Out-of-Africa hypothesis provided a means of debunking the myth that nothing good ever came out of Africa (Tobias 2002, 6, 10). The rock art of the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site provided an early expression of religion (Wright and Mazel 2007) and figures from the Linton panel from the Maclear District further south in the Eastern Cape Province became the centrepiece of the South African coat of arms (Smith *et al.* 2000). Finally, the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape World Heritage Site testified to the rise of political, economic and religious complexity in southern Africa (Leslie and Maggs 2000).

On the other hand, an increasingly vocal African nationalist stance against western intellectualism and scientific Eurocentricism began to shake the discipline of archaeology out of its comfort zone. Popular epistemologies and anti-colonial voices began to speak out against the 'falsities of scientific Eurocentrism' posing as 'universal truth' (Robins 2004, 660). Given that the social and economic denigration suffered by black South Africans had been shaped and rationalised by western epistemologies, it was not surprising that western science came under scrutiny. This standpoint suited Mbeki's Africanist philosophy and found expression in the AIDS debate. The former president's very blinkered support of the dissidents who criticised established science and medical treatment and drew attention to alternative or traditional treatments became Mbeki's legacy (Robins 2004, 660–661).

The discipline of archaeology, with its roots nurtured in European knowledge systems, could not escape the charge of scientific racism. Early practitioners saw Africans as technologically and ideologically primitive, misconstructions that suited the ideals of Afrikaner Nationalists who drew readily on the sciences to justify 'white' superiority and the separate treatment of different 'races' (Dubow 2007). Furthermore, in practice, African bodies and bones were treated as objects of study (Legassick and Rassool 2000). However, as the discipline evolved it also produced the means to question and dismiss much of the Afrikaner Nationalist ideology. By the 1980s, many activists were making use of their archaeological knowledge to question the establishment's version of history (see, for example, Mazel and Stewart 1987; Hall 1988; Wright and Mazel 1991).

Nevertheless, archaeology has struggled to break the perception that it is a 'white', Eurocentric discipline the categories and frameworks of which alienate the African past from Africans, while simultaneously being unable to speak to an

African's perceptions of the past or to be willing to entertain alternative beliefs about the past. These accusations are often heightened when archaeological discourse and knowledge directly impact on people's claims to sites, objects or human remains. Coombe (2009) makes the point that this is particularly true of contract archaeologists because of the role that they play in 'legitimising or delegitimising' the community or the developer's interests.

Prestwich Place, a colonial era burial ground in Cape Town, stands out as perhaps the best example of the clash of community concerns and agendas with government and archaeological procedures. The Prestwich Place burials, while not the only occasion on which archaeology as a 'white science' was deemed an inappropriate methodology for determining the meaning of a site (Jonker 2005, 189–190), certainly produced the most public debate of this nature. The Prestwich Place Committee (PPC), the group that campaigned against the exhumation of human remains and the development of the area, queried why it was that white people were digging up black bodies. Reverend Weeder, a leading voice on the Committee, explained the source of his dissatisfaction by recalling the words of the black American activist Malcolm X: 'Just because a person feeds the fish, it doesn't mean that he is a friend of the fish' (Jonker 2005, 193). To him and his followers, only the marginalised were capable of empathising with the marginalised.

The situation that developed at Prestwich Place was also considered a test case for the newly constituted South African Heritage Resources Agency and the NHRA, but after a lengthy process many were left somewhat disillusioned. The NHRA did not provide the legal clout needed to stop the proposed luxury housing development and, being thus unable to take a principled decision (Shepherd and Ernsten 2007, 218–220), SAHRA took a legally and politically safe position: the graves would be exhumed, but the scientists would not study the skeletons.

The bones have, instead, been placed in an ossuary near Prestwich Place and continue to be a source of discontent and disappointment. Some argue that the ossuary and the associated exhibition not only fail to commemorate the history of slavery in the Cape, but actively silence this traumatic history (Green and Murray 2010). Certainly, the 'spirit' of the place seems to have been altered by the launch of the 'Truth and Coffee' café in the museum precinct last year. Run by a radio personality and 'coffee evangelist', it is now a place to relax with Wi-Fi and sports 'funky if somewhat flimsy, pressed-wood, designer furniture' (Meersman 2011). The human remains have been incorporated into the neoliberal drive that exposed and displaced them; they have become a commercial attraction, an interesting aside to the everyday ritual of coffee drinking.

In 2004 the need for transformation, a public profile and a professional body that could represent the interests of archaeologists in the broader region prompted the renaming and reframing of the Southern African Association of Archaeologists, which, despite its name and intentions, had become an overwhelmingly *South African* body. The association thus reformed under a new name, the Association of Southern African Professional Archaeologists (ASAPA), re-established ties with other countries within the Southern African Development Community (SADC), adopted a new constitution and codes of ethics and practice, forged and implemented a system of accreditation for cultural resource management (CRM) practitioners and opened up dialogue with SAHRA. A Transformation Action Committee was put in place in 2008 to investigate ways and means of hastening the

pace of transformation (Smith 2009; Ndlovu 2009). Progress in achieving the various goals ASAPA set for itself has been made in some areas more than in others. To name a couple, SAHRA recognised ASAPA's CRM accreditation system and ASAPA received a public profile when it formed a coalition with several other interest groups to protest against mining on the boundary of the Mapungubwe World Heritage Site (Ryan 2010, 9).

In 2006 the effects of the government's neoliberal leaning began to take hold of South African universities and of the heritage sector as a whole. Market-based imperatives have necessitated the packaging, marketing and sale of education and heritage. These forces have impacted on the training of students for the market place, on archaeological sites that are increasingly 'turned over to market forces and expected to earn their keep' (Coombe 2009, 398) and on the meaning of archaeological 'significance', which is now measured against economic and political priorities.

Jean Comaroff (2004, 6) has argued convincingly that the state is increasingly assuming the role of a 'metamanagement enterprise that attracts investment, subcontracts its functions and regulates business'. The impact of such an overriding economic imperative is that the power and effectiveness of the less profitable arms of the state become diminished and muted. The Department of Minerals and Energy (DME), for example, ignored SAHRA's request for more information and a meeting to discuss the mining activities in the vicinity of Mapungubwe (SAHRA letters to DME of 25 June and 17 July 2009). Furthermore, despite deficiencies in the relevant Heritage Impact Assessment and public consultation process, the Minister of Arts and Culture was unwilling, or unable, to engage with the Minister of Minerals and Energy after the latter issued an *unconditional new order mining right* to Coal of Africa allowing them to mine on the border of the Mapungubwe World Heritage Site.

Coupled to this is the way in which state resources are increasingly allocated towards the commemoration of an ANC version of the liberation struggle. The admirable quality of tolerance is now applied patchily and partially and alternative voices and experiences are silenced, subsumed or consumed by the larger ANC narrative. South African history is the history of the struggle and the 'history of the struggle is indistinguishable from the history of the ANC' (Peires 2009, 183, reviewing Magubane 2006). A number of studies in the two provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng highlight how minority or ethnic statues, monuments and art objects are neglected, lost or dismantled if they do not conform to the dominant ANC discourse (Marschall 2010). Furthermore, monuments that commemorate historic events or incidences in which more than one political or ethnic group was involved have become exclusively linked to the ANC (Bakker and Müller 2010). The dominant ANC narrative tends to have three leitmotifs: atrocities of the past and traumatic memory; liberation struggle and resistance; forgiveness and reconciliation (cf. Bremner 2007, 95). These directives, of course, then influence the way in which SAHRA and the National Heritage Council (NHC) carry out their functions, as well as directly affecting how heritage funds are allocated.

SAHRA, for example, has taken up the mantle of restitution and healing at the expense of compliance, heritage protection legislation and the management and protection of sites and community interests. It has quietly withdrawn into the Western Cape Province, shut down all its Provincial offices and severed ties with most

of the Provincial Heritage Agencies. The lack of personal and capacity in the provincial offices, and the absence of legally mandated support from SAHRA, means that developers can now easily renege on their heritage obligations. At the present time it does not seem to be in the government's interest to develop plans to fund and deploy capacitated individuals in the heritage agencies. Currently, then, the strength of the legislation is not matched by compliance, while enforcement efforts and employment opportunities for archaeologists in government have been severely curtailed (Department of Science and Technology 2010).

Nevertheless, the growing tendency for agents of the state to buy, sell or dismiss people's claims to the past is beginning to breed discontent and mistrust. As a result, communities are turning to human rights lawyers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to take up their causes. The communities of Xolobeni (on the KwaZulu-Natal Wild Coast), Sekuruwe (near Mokopane, Limpopo Province) and Ramunangi (at Vhembe, also in Limpopo Province) are but a few examples of claims that have been taken up by human rights lawyers under constitutional law and not in terms of the NHRA. This interesting groundswell is prompting a crucial and critical re-evaluation of the way in which Environmental Impact Assessments are carried out, as well as of the artificial divisions set up between culture, society and environment. More holistic approaches are being called for that, in practice, would mean that Archaeological Impact Assessments should encompass and represent community concerns. Should this become accepted practice, archaeologists will need to ensure that communities are made aware of their rights towards their graves and cultural sites and will also need to ensure that their right to free prior, informed consent are protected (Laplanche and Spears 2008, 92–116). However, due to the emasculated state of the nation's heritage agencies, the impetus for change and the level and standard of practice will need to come from within ASAPA.

Today, archaeologists practising in South Africa occupy a morally precarious position: CRM practitioners, who carry out the vast majority of archaeology in the country, can profit from helping developers milk a very weak system, but risk being caught up in a human rights backlash. Researchers can also exploit the competency vacuum in the heritage agencies and neglect to apply for permits or provide substandard reporting. The alternative is that we continue to build the discipline ourselves, set standards of practice independently of government agencies and begin to take up a more active role in pointing out instances of corruption and human rights abuses.

In conclusion, sadly rather than providing answers, my paper also poses a series of questions about the future of Cinderella: there are, after all, a number of possible outcomes to the tale. When last seen Cinderella was hiding behind Instrumentalia and Neoliberalia. Will she maintain her wallflower status, or will she rip off her clothes, cover herself in sushi, and sell her soul to the highest bidder?¹ Or will she become dismayed by the excesses of the royal élite and their associated pageantry and join the proletariat in its demand to be heard and taken seriously?

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Note

1. This is a reference to a fashionable indulgence of some of South Africa's *nouveaux riches*.

Note on contributor

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